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UNITED STATES
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ROSA L. DELAURO

3RD DISTRICT, CONNECTICUT

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AND RELATED AGENCIES

April 11, 2016

The Honorable Sylvia Burwell
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human
Services
Hubert H. Humphrey Building
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20201

The Honorable Thomas Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave, S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretaries Burwell and Vilsack,

I am concerned with the apparent lack of consistency in the enforcement of egg food safety regulations during periods in which there are animal disease outbreaks. I am interested in knowing the extent to which your two departments coordinate when such outbreaks occur, and whether the enforcement of food safety regulations are compromised during such episodes.

Recently, the *Des Moines Register* published an extensive report that revealed that the state of Iowa and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) had halted their inspections of nearly 700 egg facilities during the avian influenza outbreak in early 2015. The reason cited by both the FDA and the Iowa Department of Agriculture for the suspension of the inspections was fear that both federal and state inspectors could help spread the avian influenza outbreak to unaffected farms. As of today, those inspections have not resumed. While I understand the temporary concern that the avian influenza outbreak could spread if there were not proper biosecurity protocols in place, I find it deeply alarming that food safety inspections in the largest egg producing state in the country are not being carried out by federal and state officials now that production has resumed. Conversely, all state and federal inspections in other large egg producing states that were temporarily suspended have since resumed. It begs the question: Why the disparate application of policy?


Proper inspection of our food supply is of vital importance. You might recall that in 2010, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) first identified a national cluster of cases of food borne illnesses involving *Salmonella Enteritidis* linked to contaminated eggs produced at the Wright County Egg farm in Iowa. That food borne illness outbreak eventually involved over 3,500 reported illnesses in 11 states and led to the recall of over 550 million eggs—making it one of the largest food recalls in U.S. history. What makes the current suspension of egg inspections

in Iowa so troubling is the fact that, just prior to the suspension in 2015, egg inspectors identified some of the same food safety violations on the same farms that contributed to the 2010 outbreak. Self-policing just does not work. We need to have inspections to ensure that food safety regulations are being followed by industry.

Given the concerns over the lack of food safety inspections, I am interested in answers to the following questions:

- 1) When will food safety inspections of egg farms and facilities in Iowa be resumed?
- 2) Have there been joint protocols developed by USDA and FDA to deal with food safety inspections during animal disease outbreaks? If so, please provide my office with copies of those protocols.
- 3) Why were some states permitted to continue food safety inspections of egg farms and facilities during the avian influenza outbreak?
- 4) How many eggs entered into commerce from Iowa during the suspension of egg food safety inspections?

Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,

Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress